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RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2805
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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1369
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2189
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2554
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2974
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 5415
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000379

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR M. GAVIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2019
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: FORGIVE AND FORGET? NOT YET -- RECONCILIATION SLOW
IN RURAL ZIMBABWE

REF: 08 HARARE 527

Classified By: Charge d'affaires, a.i. Katherine Dhanani for reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Progress towards forgiveness is slow in Gutu South, a rural constituency that was hard hit by violence during the 2008 inter-election period. Although some chiefs are leading an effort towards reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of violence, fear and intimidation remain high and reconciliation is slow. Villagers told us that ZANU-PF leaders continue to threaten to beat MDC members whenever the next election is held, and war veterans maintain bases in the area. Reports of ZANU-PF political leaders' distribution of food and bicycles to party members represents a continuation of years of politicized aid by the party. END SUMMARY.

Rural Zim -- A Year After the "Moment of Madness"

12. (SBU) A year after political violence devastated Zimbabwe's rural communities, poloff and a poloff from the British Embassy visited the Gutu South constituency, at the invitation of the Gutu Rural District Council, on May 6. In the 2008 parliamentary election, Gutu South elected MDC MP Eliphas Mukonoweshuro (now also Minister of Public Service) over ZANU-PF incumbent Shuvai Mahofa. In fact, this rural area elected several MDC candidates for the first time ever, sparking significant violence (Ref). A year ago, this region was a no-go area and our visit would have caused an uproar and perhaps violence or retribution against our interlocutors. This trip, in contrast, was peaceful and we were greeted warmly.

13. (SBU) This area is far from the beaten track and newspaper distribution, meaning radio is the only real source of

information. Community leaders told us in hushed voices that they rely on Studio 7, the local VOA outlet, as their primary source of balanced, fair news.

Schools Open and Struggling

14. (SBU) We first visited Rupiri Secondary School, home to about 280 students who walk as much as 10 km to reach the school. Despite threats of a teachers' strike, all teachers were present and teaching full classes. None of the children in the school had paid any portion of the US\$5 school fee for the term, which began on May 5. Teachers and administrators acknowledged that none of the children could afford to pay the fee, which would normally fund supplies for the school like textbooks, chalk, and cleaning supplies. Without school fees, the headmaster does not know how they will obtain the supplies. Not surprisingly, a significant textbook shortage means children must share. The headmaster, also the English teacher, has just four textbooks for his two classes of about 40 children each. (NOTE: In rural schools, this textbook-to-student ratio is not uncommon. END NOTE.) (NOTE: In rural schools, this textbook-to-student ratio is not uncommon. END NOTE.)

Villagers Not Yet Ready to Forgive and Forget

15. (SBU) In Ma-na township, an hour's drive on a dirt road from the main highway, we met with the MDC councilor for ward

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27, Jeffrey Tangimari, and about 40 constituents under the shade of a tree behind the empty general store. Although the meeting was intended to be an opportunity for ZANU-PF perpetrators and MDC victims to share their experiences and discuss moving forward, only one perpetrator was present. He stood before the group and said he felt used by the ZANU-PF apparatus. He and others were promised jobs and money if they beat MDC members so that they would not vote in the June 27, 2008 runoff election. He said he is like everyone else in the constituency and has nothing. He expressed regret for his actions and asked for help in providing medical care to the victims still nursing injuries. Villagers also explained that even though some ZANU-PF perpetrators regret their actions and want to be reintegrated, they remain fearful of ZANU-PF retaliation for "changing sides."

16. (SBU) After the lone perpetrator present asked for forgiveness, numerous villagers, including several elderly women, rose to tell of the beatings they endured, the livestock stolen, and the nights they slept in the cold after their homes were burned to the ground by ZANU-PF supporters. One woman told of a cow that was stolen in 2002 -- a sign that memories and anger go far beyond the 2008 election violence. Many reported they were forced to vote for Robert Mugabe in the June 27 runoff election. Although some said they could forgive these wrongs -- if they could recoup lost property and they were assured future elections would be peaceful, free, and fair -- none expressed a willingness to forget.

17. (SBU) Although some chiefs and councilors have spearheaded community-building efforts, like reciprocal watering of community gardens and soccer games, tensions and fears are still palpable.

"To Us the Word 'Election' Means Death"

18. (SBU) Villagers went on to tell us that they had all heard recent threats from ZANU-PF supporters and ZANU-PF affiliated headmen and chiefs that they will be beaten or killed in the next election. In addition, ZANU-PF and war veterans were

already forming bases just a few kilometers away. One man told us he had no faith that the next elections would be free and fair; he explained, "to us the word 'election' means death." Although they all want the inclusive government to work at the national level, even more important to them, at the local level they want village headmen and chiefs to be non-partisan and the threat of election-related violence to end.

ZANU-PF Campaigning Has Begun

19. (C) In his Ministry office on May 7, MP Mukonoweshuro confirmed that Dr. Paul Chimedza has already begun campaigning against him for his parliamentary seat. The defeated ZANU-PF MP candidate (who now says she wants to be Senator), Shuvai Mahofa, has also been in the constituency (Senator), Shuvai Mahofa, has also been in the constituency and was distributing maize seed to ZANU-PF supporters as recently as April 2. In her statements to locals, she misled constituents and told them that under the "unity government" both she and Mukonoweshuro are MPs for the area. According to MDC activists in the constituency, at the end of April, Chimedza distributed 30 bicycles at one rural elementary school. (NOTE: Chimedza, who is a former president of the Zimbabwe Medical Association, is also chairman of Zimbabwe Health Alliance Trust (ZIHAT), an NGO that claims to solicit funds from the U.S. and Europe to benefit Zimbabwe's public

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health system. END NOTE.)

110. (C) Mukonoweshuro told us that ZANU-PF candidates are distributing goods that were taken from the government and Reserve Bank before the unity government was formed in February. He acknowledged widespread fear of violence and told us that Zimbabwe needs to return to a "modicum of normalcy" in order to develop an honest people-driven constitution and to have a free and fair election. He hoped the MDC would push through enough structural changes in the government, including to the police and army, to make change inevitable and propel the country towards a free and fair election.

COMMENT

111. (C) The continued fear in Gutu South is indicative of the long term devastation the 2008 ZANU-PF terror campaign inflicted on the countryside. While the public remains hopeful that the transitional government will bring about peace, our visit made clear that people are nowhere near letting their guard down. Memories of last year's violence are still fresh, and no significant steps have been taken to return livestock or crops that were stolen or destroyed. Some measures, like community soccer, are playing a modest role in rebuilding trust, but broader efforts, like a restructuring of police and de-politicization of village heads, are needed to reduce the fear associated with elections. For the moment, poor, rural victims in Gutu have no real means of obtaining the recourse they desire to achieve meaningful reconciliation. END COMMENT.

DHANANI